

zeitgeschichte

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**The Memory of Guilt Revisited.
The Slovenian Post-Socialist Remembrance
Landscape in Transition**

edited by
Oto Luthar and Heidemarie Uhl

Marta Verginella
Political Remake of Slovenian History and Trivialisation of Memory

Bojan Godeša
Slovenian Historiography in the Grip of Reconciliation

Marko Zajc
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the Victims of All Wars

Maruša Pušnik
Media-Based Historical Revisionism and the Public's Memories of the
Second World War

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The Sanitation of Slovenian Post-Socialist Memorial Landscape

zeitgeschichte extra: Petra Mayrhofer
Searching for "1989" on the Transnational Remembrance Landscape:
A Topography

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Heidemarie Uhl

Editorial

The collapse of the communist states is regarded as the starting point of the new Europe. With this turning point, historical narratives have had to be rewritten in the post-socialist countries. While the destruction of Communist monuments is imprinted on European collective memory as a visual icon reflecting this caesura, the much more complex process of opening up and diversifying the writing of history has drawn little attention. This also holds true for the nationalist and revisionist backlash in dealing with traumatic historical events, which tends to be highlighted only in the context of specific, particularly dramatic political interventions and measures, such as the marginalization of the Holocaust by the House of Terror in Budapest or the Polish Memory Laws.

Focusing on the little known case of Slovenia, this issue of *zeitgeschichte* offers a comprehensive survey of the transformations affecting collective memory and the writing of history in one post-communist country. We are very pleased to have won Oto Luthar, arguably the most distinguished Slovenian exponent of a form of memory history that meets international scholarly standards, as guest editor. His introduction and the essays in this issue analyze the ways in which Slovenian society has grappled with traumatic historical events. The authors pointedly probe the fields of history politics, memorial culture and the writing of history against the background of the Europe-wide changes in the construction of memory. Specific microhistories allow for an analysis of relevant controversies and political interventions in the struggle over the interpretation of Slovenia's past. Given the proliferating illiberal tendencies in the political culture of numerous European countries, which threaten to curtail critical scholarly discussions of the dominant versions of national history, the strategies of historical revisionism described in this issue are likely to be of considerable interest not only to scholars interested specifically in the case of Slovenia.

Oto Luthar

Introduction

After 1989, the impact of historical representation on forming new democracies has become an inseparable part of the new politics of history in post-socialist societies. According to Charles S. Maier, discussion about the changing “architecture of historical knowledge”¹ also took place in certain other European countries. Even more so, the new “hunger for memory”² became “a remarkable cultural feature” across Western Europe. Indeed memory, and particularly memory relating to *the century of extremes*, has become a subject of contemplation in its own right rather than the mere subject of the past. This change was not confined to the late 1980s, and it took place well beyond the bounds of Western Europe. To some extent, it was even the societies of the “Eastern Bloc” that experienced “an era of self-archaeologization.”³ The latter was particularly true for Yugoslavia and – within it – Slovenia. Therefore, the editors of this volume, much like Marta Verginella in her contribution, aim to draw attention to the aftermath of the so-called nationalization of the past, or the fact that the professional debate over the nature of historical explanation, which started in the 1980s, has largely been overshadowed by new attempts to monopolize historical interpretation. The once vivid interest in new forms of historical representation has given way to the politicized reinterpretation of national histories in all countries of the former Yugoslavia. In Slovenian historiography, the euphoria that accompanied the struggle for independence opened the way for a steam-roller of positivist nationalism that flattened almost every hint of interpretational polyphony. The debate that started in the early 1980s following the first critical articles on socialist historiography,⁴ and the first translations of relevant theo-

1 Alun Munslow, *The New History* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2003), 1.

2 Charles S. Maier, *The Unmasterable Past. History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 149.

3 *Ibid.*, 123.

4 Vodopivec, Peter. “Poskus opredelitve razvoja slovenskega zgodovonopisja z vidika zgodovina-ideologija” [A Tentative Definition of the Development of Slovenian Historiography in Light of the Relationship between History and Ideology], *Problemi*, November 1, 1984.

retical considerations regarding the nature of historical interpretation,⁵ has largely been replaced by the nationalist interpretation of national cultural heritage. Consequently, the anticipated democratization and (post)modernization of historical interpretation have been obstructed by yet another monopolization of historical interpretation, followed by a new political monopolization of a certain kind of historical interpretation. The change was, and still is, closely connected with Slovenian revisionist and negationist currents. It is based on a more or less archaic understanding of the postmodern view of history as an authoring process, while most historians have actually never stopped believing history to be a straightforward interpretative report of factual findings. In their mystification of the national past, history thus remains an interpretational and politically inspired project rather than the result of uncertainties of meanings created “through the exercise of our own mind.”⁶ Even more so, the revisionists deliberately use a narrow understanding of history to place their politicized interpretation on the agenda as completely relevant and legitimate.

Therefore, the academic colleagues⁷ who were invited to participate in this special volume were particularly encouraged to engage in fields where the dynamics of change in dealing with the politics of memory in Slovenia can be observed. In their own distinctive ways and with various disciplinary focal points, the contributors were asked to rethink 1) the emergence of the new politics of memory; that is, post-communist historiographies, particularly in relation to the question of possible political involvement in interpreting the past and its effects on discussing the theory and philosophy of history; 2) the nationalization of the past by reinventing “authentic national historical memory”; and 3) the mediatization of traumatic history (or a traumatic past) by using new communication technologies.

From these focal points, the authors – from the University of Ljubljana, the Institute of Contemporary History, and the Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts – address the relationship between various modes of post-communist enactments of memory and representations of the past.

Like other former communist countries, Slovenia has also been witnessing –

5 See for example Oto Luthar, *Vsi Tukididovi možje. Sodobne teorije zgodovinopisja* (Ljubljana: Krt, 1990).

6 Alun Munslow, *The New History* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2003), 34.

7 The invited authors have participated in the debate on the post-socialist politics of memory for at least ten years, and three of them have dealt with the topic for almost two decades. When thinking of also inviting authors pushing for the radical reinterpretation of the historical period under discussion, it became clear that over the last twenty-five years, their interpretation more or less merged with their ideological perspective. Instead of openly discussing questions of objectivity, truth and causation, they still believe that historical truth resides in justified descriptive statements that correspond to the empirical reconstruction of human intentionality, while some of them turned into political commentators.

since the second half of the 1990s – a politically motivated radical re-interpretation of the most traumatic periods of national history. The brief period of attempts toward symbolic reconciliation, a period that was underscored by a special meeting between Slovenia’s first president, Milan Kučan, and the Archbishop of Ljubljana Alojzij Šuštar,⁸ boiled down to a fierce struggle over the past. A country whose population had fought tooth and nail to distance itself from the Balkans two decades or so later witnessed the entrenchment of what, according to the Slovenian diplomat Vojko Volk, is particularly characteristic of this part of Europe. In his opinion, Slovenia, too, has become known as a part of the world “where historians deal with politics and politicians with history.”⁹

While in contrast to Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia & Herzegovina, only few Slovenian historians ended up in politics, but they crucially contributed to a polarization in the understanding of the period during and after the Second World War; a polarization that was triggered by a systematic reversal of the roles of victims and perpetrators, and a fitful advocacy of “functional” collaboration with the German and Italian forces. As in other processes of this kind, the Slovenian material and interpretative *sanitization*¹⁰ of the Second World War and its aftermath started almost immediately after independence. The material-symbolic sanitization includes the desecration of the Jewish section of Ljubljana’s central cemetery, the destruction of memorial pillars tracing the barbed wire fence that enclosed occupied Ljubljana in 1942–1943, and the erection of monuments to the “victims of communist violence.” The symbolic sanitization, on the other hand, comprises historiographical reinterpretations of interwar developments, with an emphasis on the rehabilitation of local collaboration with the Fascist and Nazi occupation forces.

Since 2014, the new landscape of memory started to systematically translate the members of the Partisan resistance movement, hostages, and civilian casu-

8 At the ceremony, organized by the Slovenian Presidency, Milan Kučan explicitly acknowledged the accountability of the communist government for the postwar killings by concluding with the best speech he delivered in all of his entire presidential terms, stating: “Here they were killing us. Here we were killing each other. Here we were fighting and hiding against violence. Here we were winning and hiding the evil that was caused by our fighting and winning. Here victory often turned into defeat. Let us say to each other: here, where the bones are scattered of all who were fighting for this or that truth, with this or that thought, is the right place for reconciliation, which we need as a nation looking forward into the future. For what happened, we are sincerely regretful. Let us end it, here and now. It was.” (<http://www.bivsi-predsednik.si/up-rs/2002-2007/bp-mk.nsf/dokumenti/08.07.1990-90-92>)

9 Vojko Volk, “Zgodovina, nočna mora Balkana,” *Sobotna priloga Dela* (August 15, 2018): 15. The complete sentence is as follows: “In fact, the Balkans is wherever historians deal with politics and politicians deal with history.”

10 I have decided to use the term sanitization because of the way in which Slovenian revisionists were meticulously separating and deleting facts that would endanger their reinterpretation of the 1930s, the Second World War, and the period immediately after the war.

alties into perpetrators, while portraying collaborationist troops as victims. From that point on, all those who have opposed this reinvention have been dismissed as “arch-revisionists,” “arch-manipulators,” and “fired-up philo-communist diehards.” Instead of the previous balancing of guilt and the re-framing of occupation and resistance against it into civil war, the revised or sanitized interpretation simply reversed the roles of victims and perpetrators. Even more so, according to the authors of the revised national history, in 1945 Slovenia did not enter a period of freedom, but one of “dictatorship”, whose proponents continue to dominate the media space even after independence. One of the authors who has been consistently supportive of the radical interpretation of this part of history goes even as far as to talk of “an underground coup”, or a coup by “the former UDBA”; that is, the former secret police.¹¹ This provided the reason for one of the papers in this volume to investigate the mediatization of the past, as most discussions take place in daily newspapers and on various television channels, including national television. In recent years, this has been the medium where revisionists¹² have discussed “communist dictatorship” and “the Slovenian Holocaust.”¹³

However, rather than offering specific case studies, the authors of this volume are more interested in the use of language and the modes of historicization in which revisionists follow the “creative response concept,”¹⁴ claiming that one should never let the facts get in the way of intended interpretation.

11 Jože Možina, “Žal mi je, vse je res,” *Sobotna priloga Dela* (August 18, 2018): 20. Although the UDBA (Serbo-Croatian: *Uprava državne bezbednosti*) had a Slovenian branch of the State Security Administration (the UDV, or *Uprava državne varnosti*), authors like Možina prefer to use the Serbo-Croatian name, stressing the interpretation that communism was an import from Soviet Russia, and from other parts of Yugoslavia.

12 Here the term (*historical*) *revisionism* is understood as a practice of radical reinterpretation of the past that is unequally founded on the penchant for therapeutic values over cognitive values. Like Aviezer Tucker, I understand this as revised historiography immune to the effect of evidence; see Aviezer Tucker, “Historiographic Revision and Revisionism: The Evidential Difference,” in *Past in the Making: Historical Revisionism in Central Europe After 1989*, edited by Michal Kopeček (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 3. Furthermore, the term is used here to describe the process of the post-communist radical reinterpretation of the most traumatic aspects of the past of Eastern European countries in the twentieth century. The term is, needless to say, inadequate. However, for the time being, I see no alternatives. The terms *negationism, the monopolization of memory, the distortion of history, rewriting, reinventing, redefining, re-evaluating, re-reading, abusing, erasing, changing, colonizing, and ... the past* do not cover the full spectrum; therefore, the search for a more adequate term continues.

13 The term “Slovenian Holocaust” is frequently used by Slovenian right-wing politicians. One such politician is also the former president of parliament, Dr. France Cukjati, from 2016 the president of the revisionist right-wing platform Zbor za republiko/Core for the Republic. See also Matjaž Gruden, “‘Slovenski holokavst’ ali kako manipulira zborovodja mopedšova za republiko,” in *Hokuspokus*, August 29, 2019.

14 The best proof of this concept’s scope and impact is the public relations company with the same sounding name, which has a focus on issue advocacy. According to their website

This issue has received detailed consideration in Maruša Pušnik's article, especially in terms of how the memories of the Second World War are mediated. Pušnik analyses historical revisionism in the media within the context of wider sociopolitical history-making processes in Slovenia. As her analysis determines, the mainstream media fuel memory battles in Slovenian public space, create revisionist narratives of the Second World War, and thus prompt audiences to erase old memories and create new ones. The forced forgetting of the Second World War, promoted by the current media discursive regime, also coincides with popular memories and the politics of bottom-up memory. In her opinion, such a politics of memory obscures the paradigm of the liberators and the aggressors, and influences the popular perception of developments that took place during and after the war.

Proceeding from Hannah Arendt's reflection on the political use of history (in *Truth and Politics*), Marta Verginella deals with the controversial relationship between historical truth and its political distortions. In her view, the strong political and public uses of history in Slovenia coexist with fundamental processes and transitions within Slovenian society. The Slovenian "memory boom" is in some aspects similar to what took place in the Yugoslav area, and in other European countries. On the other hand, Verginella points out certain specific aspects of the Slovenian politics of the past, claiming that the post-communist interest in "all victims" does not include the latest historical research, but tends to be substituted by a political-memorializing plan in which the victims are increasingly enveloped in a kind of sacredness and power.

The concept of national reconciliation is part of this enveloping, and this is the topic of Bojan Godeša's article. Beginning with the introduction of the concept to Slovenia in the 1980s, the author believes the idea of national reconciliation to be a suitable basis for transcending internal disparities. On the other hand, he shares the belief that the ideology of reconciliation affirms a specific type of historical revisionism, whose central point is a total silence regarding pre-war confessional and ideological anti-Semitism by the Slovenian Catholic Church and its close ally, the Slovenian People's Party. Similarly to Irena Šumi, he believes that the ideology of reconciliation likewise totally suppresses the wartime persecution of Slovenian Jews at the hands of the collaborationist authorities, as well as the post-war programmatic anti-Semitism of the revolutionary authorities. With this complete omission, the idea of reconciliation not only entirely

presentation, this is all "about shaping public opinion and creating success." Their latest project is related to the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh for the US Supreme Court.

missed its declared goal of “accepting our history”, but decontextualized the history itself – and in so doing, distorted it.¹⁵

When talking about the ways in which a society remembers past traumatic events and processes such as the Second World War and post-war killings, for Marko Zajc the question is not only what is being discussed, but also what discourse or set of concepts is being used.¹⁶ According to his analysis of recent literature in Slovenia, one of the most frequently used concepts is that of “transitional justice”,¹⁷ which is found in legal and political science literature on the topic, as well as in publications by non-governmental organizations.¹⁸

The main focus of Zajc’s article, however, is on the newest monument dedicated to the “victims of all wars”, which was unveiled in the summer of 2017. Because the event was eagerly commented on by all political parties, public intellectuals, and the media, he is particularly interested in the media reflections that focused on what currently seems to be the prevailing signifier. Alongside this, Zajc is convinced that emptiness is truly the main characteristic of the monument. The viewpoint of the monument clearly manifests the ideology of Slovenian national dissension, or its division into two more or less equal parts.

By analysing changes in the post-communist memorial landscape of Slovenia after 1991, Oto Luthar focuses on the latest shift in this process. According to his analysis, the first twenty years after the end of communism were marked by an ambition to redistribute responsibility (and blame) for the civil war by placing responsibility squarely on the Slovenian Partisans. After 2014, however, the memorials demand a more radical reinterpretation. According to their inscriptions, the Partisans and the civilian victims of the Nazis and Fascists are to be understood as perpetrators, whereas the members of collaborationist units, organized as the Home Guard, are praised as members of a Slovenian National Army.

The second part of Luthar’s analysis looks at US involvement in this process. In 2014, the former US ambassador to Slovenia initiated the installing of the commemorative plaque that describes Nazi and Fascist collaborators as “Slovenians [...] who sought peace but could not avoid war.”¹⁹ In so doing, the

15 See also Irena Šumi, “Slovenski antisemitizem, živ pokopan v ideologiji slovenske narodne sprave,” *ČKZ – Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, 43, (2015) 260: 69–84.

16 Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995), 107–130.

17 Jon Elster, *Closing the Books. Transitional Justice in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 77.

18 Olivera Simić and Zala Volčič (eds.), *Transitional Justice and Civil Society in the Balkans* (New York: Springer, 2013), 1.

19 The address in its entirety went further: besides transforming the perpetrators into victims, the deputy ambassador invited the audience gathered in front of the embassy in August 2016

mission not only reinterpreted the most traumatic part of modern Slovenian history, but also became directly involved in the Slovenian politics of the past.

All the authors in this volume, however, share Foucault's belief that discourses are not simply presentations, but also constitute practices of power because they play an active part in the formation of the phenomena of which they speak. In addition, we are even more aware that a significant portion of Slovenian historiography, be it positivist or objectivist, has always been predominantly marked by the seal of national ideology. For these authors, not to mention the negationists, historical writing inherited from the nineteenth century still offers a very credible model of pure scholarly thought.

“to honor and celebrate” the Slovenian negationists as “those who honestly seek reconciliation” and “strive to preserve Slovenia’s independence and identity.”

Artikel

Marta Verginella

Political Remake of Slovenian History and Trivialisation of Memory

Premise

In *Truth and Politics* (1967), Hannah Arendt examined the political uses to which history was put, inviting us to reflect on the contentious relationship between truth and politics and, above all, on the distortions or negations of certain truths deployed and defended by politics. If recourse to falsehood seems compatible with politics, not only in totalitarian regimes but also in western democracies (some of Arendt's observations referred to the use of falsehood in the United States' politics of image during the Vietnam War), it is because it has always been considered a necessary and legitimate political tool. As she pointed out: 'No one has ever doubted that truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other, and no one, as far as I know, has ever counted truthfulness among the political virtues. Lies have always been regarded as necessary and justifiable tools not only of the politician's or the demagogue's but also of the statesman's trade.'¹

The scholar's concern is not so much with the habit politicians have of preferring opinions to facts; rather, it is with the negation and perversion of every kind of truth and with the lack of respect on the part of politics for the 'truth of the fact', no less than the capacity of politics to distort and manipulate that truth even in cases where society has documentary proof to the contrary. That said, it is often society itself that prefers this kind of approach, and is prepared to support those politicians capable of adapting the facts to meet the expectations of their supporters. Faced with the self-deception practised by the political class for the 'common good', as has happened in the American case, it should be culture that takes up defence of the truth and interrupts this vicious circle that exists between politics and society.

Way back in 1967, Arendt's confidence in the 'guardians' of the truth, in scholars, intellectuals and judges, and in the capacity of academic culture to

¹ Hannah Arendt, *Truth and Politics* (New York, London, Victoria, Toronto, Auckland: Penguin Books, 2000), 545.

correct political action can appear somewhat ingenuous today. Not only because the means at the disposal of academic culture have been, and continue to be, considerably reduced in favour of the mass media and social networks in recent decades, but also because part of the world of culture itself, whose aim should be to discover, protect and interpret the truth of the fact, tends to bend to the demands of the political and public abuse of history. Simplified readings of the recent past and historical narratives that propose easy analogies with structurally different historical phenomena (and that are nevertheless interested in uncovering 'new-old' political subjects) are taking hold, not only in marginal areas of forums and blogs, but even in historiographical and academic environments. The obsession with *making everything visible* and with bringing to light the traumas of the 20th century do not necessarily produce a greater or more complex awareness of the past, of ourselves, or of others.²

Since the end of the 1980s, and with greater insistence since the 1990s, there have been discussions in various European contexts concerning the political and public use and abuse of history, the importance of memory as it relates to oblivion,³ the negative effects of an excessive amplification of remembrance at the expense of forgetting, and how new remembrance practices are often an answer to powerful demands for ideological repositioning from promoters of new political and national genealogies. That the promotion of these practices have something to do with research into new political points of reference is evident above all in those European contexts in which there is a greater need to 'forget' pre-transition political associations and those affiliations that have now become obsolete.

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the interpretations and representations of the past that had been developed during the World War II and remained in force until the 1980s proved to be no longer appropriate. In the former communist world in particular, the 'remake of the world', as Istvan Rév defined it analysing the Hungarian case, became unavoidable: 'certainties, the pillars of life had gone; familiar recurring events, the rhythm of existence, ordinary days and holidays, the well-known street names, the social significance of the neighbourhood, the significance of photographs in the family album, social capital, the knowledge of Russian as a foreign language to be used, the value of the sociometric network of

2 Manuel Cruz, *I brutti scherzi del passato, Identità, responsabilità, storia* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010), 16–17.

3 Both remembering and forgetting are objects of cultural contraction. The dialectical relationship between the two takes place within a determined collectivity, and is conditioned by power balances and by those who write history (Idith Zertal, *Israele e la Shoah. La nazione e il culto della tragedia* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000), 43.

one's own private and professional world, the stability of memories, the comprehension of private and public history.⁴

In common with other countries of Eastern Europe, Hungary abandoned those accounts that had sought to create a common and shared identity under the banner of communist ideology, along with 'the horizon within which national history in the decades following World War II was perceived',⁵ in an effort to restore the national continuity that had been interrupted by World War II and by communism. In the case of Yugoslavia, the narrative of the 'War of Liberation', which had been the source of legitimisation and identity for the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as one of the cornerstones of socialist regimes until the 1980s, began to be gradually abandoned as the ideological glue that had bound together the nations of Yugoslavia cracked and the victims of revolutionary and communist violence gradually resurfaced at the centre of the public debate. The act of remembrance of wartime and post-war massacres began to be transformed ever more clearly into a condemnation of Tito's regime, and to be included in the collective memory of all those experiences that the Yugoslav population had undergone during and after World War II and that had remained concealed for more than 40 years.⁶ In the public debate and in the Yugoslav history books published before the 1990s, space had been made for the partisans and for the heroes of the War of Liberation; the defeated remained outside the official narrative, relegated to individual and family memories. The experiences of deportations to Nazi camps and internments in Fascist camps remained at the margins of collective memory; and although they were occasionally remembered and testimonies were collected, they did not enter the official context developed to commemorate the partisan epic. The multiplication of memories and an ever-more intense process of historical revisiting in the Yugoslav context not only opened new spaces for democracy, but also served to justify new acts of violence.⁷ Some of the subjects excluded from the historical narrative in force in Yugoslavia until the end of the 1980s became promoters of new forms of collective memory, and their moral ransom demands encountered new interested political listeners to represent them.

If we compare the new forms of public memory installed since the 1990s in the

4 István Rév, *Giustizia retroattiva, Preistoria del comunismo* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007), 19.

5 Alfredo Laudiero, *Oltre il nazionalismo. Le nuove storiografie dell'est* (Naples: L'ancora del Mediterraneo, 2004), 24.

6 During the communist period, around 100,000 people were executed without trial in the territory of present-day Slovenia in 1945 and 1946, and buried in more than 600 secret mass graves. Approximately 14,000 of them were Slovenes, the rest were Croats, Serbs, Montenegrins and Germans.

7 Wolfgang Höpken, "Tra politica della memoria e lutto: ricordare la Seconda guerra mondiale in Jugoslavia," *Cattive memorie. Luoghi, simboli e narrazioni delle guerre nei Balcani. Diario europeo*, I/2008: 30.

former Yugoslavia with those that have appeared in other European countries, we see that the equilibrium established between oblivion and memory has always been linked to demands made by single political subjects, i. e. defenders of the interests of those defeated during World War II and also, in Eastern Europe, of those who had been distanced from positions of power after the establishment of communism. In this context, mention should be made of the link created between the victims of 20th century bloodshed and their supporters through the various attempts made to obtain material and moral redress – a link which, regardless of the specificity of the single context that generated it, denotes a community of interaction between memory, history and politics.⁸ This signals a clear change of direction by those memory-related practices that occur in a society in which the number of people prepared to apportion blame increases, while the number of people prepared to take responsibility or blame upon themselves grows smaller.⁹

In a society affected by ‘commemorative bulimia’ and increasingly tempted by innocence, openness to self-incrimination and the assumption of ethical responsibility effectively decreases at the same time as conditions favourable to victim discourse are created. Valentina Pisanty, efficiently highlighting this tendency to give greater centrality to victims, explains that ‘the symbolic condition of Victim is paraded as an honorary title, a generator of social prestige and moral capital’. The victim is not seen as a traumatised person who is to be helped to reintegrate into everyday life, but rather as a representative ‘of a universal and permanent psychological condition’.¹⁰ The revival of the victim mechanism is the privilege of not only of the survivors, as David Bidussa clearly points out, ‘but also and increasingly of those who have a paranoid vision of reality, obsessed by the idea of powerful forces that act against their own people. An affirmation of the process of producing victims that eliminates the historical and factual dimension of its realisation in terms of acts, conflicts, figures, circumstances.’¹¹

In the Slovenian case with which we are concerned, a strong political and public use of history exists alongside practices that foster oblivion concerning the historically fundamental processes and transitions of Slovenian society. The Slovenian ‘memory boom’ is in some respects similar to that which took place in Yugoslavia and in other European countries (particularly in ex-communist countries after the political changes of the late 1980s and early 1990s). However,

8 On the elective relationship between the historian and power, cf. Aldo Giannuli, *L'abuso pubblico della storia* (Parma: Guanda, 2009), 18.

9 Manuel Cruz, *I brutti scherzi del passato. Identità, responsabilità, storia* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2010), 70.

10 Valentina Pisanty, *Abusi di memoria. Negare, banalizzare, sacralizzare la Shoah* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2012), 6.

11 David Bidussa, *Dopo l'ultimo testimone* (Torino: Einaudi, 2009).

it has also had certain specific aspects that I will seek to point out. The demand, backed by political will, for space to be given to the memory of the victims has not been translated in Slovenia into a need to grant equal respect to all innocent victims of political violence and to their memory. Moreover, the attention paid to victims has not automatically been transformed into a demand for greater historiographical examination, since in the commemorative context the plan for historical knowledge tends to be substituted by a political-memorial plan in which the victims are increasingly invested with a kind of sacredness and power.¹²

The ambivalent and conflicting features of history have been sanitised to make them suit the new narrative offered at official and public occasions.¹³ The lack of an extension of historiographical investigation, at least until the end of the 1990s, suited very precise political choices, and therefore permitted those subjects to be hidden that, if investigated, would have made it possible to understand that ‘mass violence [was] the result of a complex interweaving of three protagonists: executioners, victims and bystanders, meaning the “grey area” found in the middle and whose behaviour often decides the outcome of a conflict.’¹⁴ When one proceeds from this statement, as Enzo Traverso observes, then one is forced to ‘recognize that giving exclusive attention to the memory of the victims risks distorting the reading of an event.’¹⁵

Forgetful society, divided memories

In Slovenian society, which in terms of its demographical and geographical dimensions can be defined as a *face-to-face* society, it is not difficult to reconstruct the circuits forged between politics and history, between commemorative practices and political subjects, as well as the ways and times with which the mass media (and historiography itself) have favoured the rewriting of the recent past. In this paper, I will seek to identify some of the salient lines of practices of this type and to explain the reasons why they are activated. I will also take a brief look at the role that memory, both individual and collective, has played (and still plays) in the practice of rewriting Slovenian history, above all that of World War II and the post-war period.

For at least some decades, the recent Yugoslav past has been the object of geopolitical analysis and of sociological and historiographic commentary that

12 Cf. Zertal, *Israele la Shoah*, cit. VIII.

13 Marcela Ravenna, *Carnefici e vittime* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2004), 92.

14 Enzo Traverso, *A ferro e a fuoco. La guerra civile europea 1914–1945* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007), 11.

15 Traverso, *A ferro e a fuoco*, 11.

converges in identifying, in the exploitable and political use of history, one of the assumptions of nationalistic euphoria that preceded and accompanied the bloodbath in the Balkan Peninsula.¹⁶ At the beginning of the 1990s, of all the republics of the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia found itself to be the one least subject to the politically instrumental use of history, with the political and institutional changes peacefully brought about from the end of the 1980s helping to immunise it somewhat from the horrors taking place elsewhere in the region. Slovenia also seemed to be the least prone to easy revisionism and to revisiting its recent past in an exclusively nationalistic key. After ten years of independence, however, history was proving to be an essential tool for nourishing a strong national identity, as well as becoming the main tool for delegitimising the centre-left political forces then in government, which have been claimed to represent continuity with the Yugoslav past.¹⁷ Now, almost three decades on from the creation of the Slovenian state, contemporary Slovenian history continues to be not only one of the privileged spaces of political confrontation, but also the device and principal motive by which, in many cases, the delegitimation of political subjects is activated and realised.

Concerning this, we should note the regret often expressed by important representatives of the centre-right and of the Slovenian Church concerning the fact that the country has not, since independence, carried out a process of political purging (*lustration*) and has therefore not removed from important public and institutional offices all those supporters and representatives of the past regime.¹⁸ There have been numerous cases of a casual and manipulative use of documentation emanating from the files of the Yugoslav secret service (UDBA), which have been conveniently cleansed above all of those documents that could have compromised members of the old establishment who had remained active during the transition period. Those who benefited most from this were those political players who, when changing their affiliation, repudiated their own communist past, passing themselves off as representing the new present. In more than one case, documentation preserved in the UDBA archives was revealed in court to have been improperly used to politically discredit in-

16 On the instrumentalisation of history in the Yugoslav context, see Hrvoje Glavač, *Prošlost je teško pitanje* (Zagreb: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, 2000); Igor Graovac, Igor (ed.), *Dijalog povjesničara/istoričara* (Zagreb: Friedrich-Naumann-Stiftung, 2005); Nebojša Popov (ed.), "Srpska strana rata; Trauma i katarza u istorijskom pamćenju," *Migracijske i etničke teme*, 20 (4), December 2004.

17 Marta Verginella, "Il peso della storia in Fra invenzione della tradizione e ri-scrittura del passato. La storiografia slovena degli anni Novanta," *Qualestoria*, XXVII (1999) 1: 9–34.

18 The advocates of *lustration* do not, however, specify exactly which categories of person should have been considered, leaving its eventual implementation suspended. This was also certainly because implementation would have had serious consequences for the top echelons of the centre-right, which comprises persons whose communist militancy was marked.

dividual public personalities¹⁹ whose main defect was to be in open disagreement with the political forces of the centre-right and, in particular, with the SDS party²⁰ of Janez Janša, in his youth a notable member of the League of Communists and today a fervent anti-communist.

As an example of this tendency, the day of remembrance organised on 7 October 2012 to commemorate the post-war massacres at Teharje²¹ is worth mentioning. On that occasion, while the ex-bishop of Koper Metod Piriš underlined the necessity of giving a name and a surname to every victim and of restoring to memory all those who had not had the right to be buried, Boštjan Zadnikar, representative of *Nova slovenska zaveza* (New Slovenian Commitment), an organisation known for its ‘militant anti-communism’,²² used far more inflammatory terms, declaring that Slovenia, still infested with neo-Bolshevism, needed external spiritual and moral arbitration, and that the future of the nation was uncertain precisely because the population were forced to live alongside neo-Bolsheviks; according to Zadnikar, this ‘accursed revolution’ meant that Slovenians would never be a normal and united nation. ‘About 70 years have passed since those terrible times. We are in 2012 and Slovenia is different today. Or is it really? No, alas it isn’t so. The people who at that time were allowed to create terror and genocide on their own nation are still here. They live among us. With other names and surnames, but with the same identical mentality and ideology. They still always act from a position of force. They are extremely haughty and arrogant.’²³

19 Of particular note are the campaigns of vilification against the president of the Association of Slovenian Writers Venko Taufer (2012) and of the eminent jurist Ljubo Bavcon, who was engaged in the civil rights movement between the 1970s and the beginning of 2013. Both noteworthy personalities were disqualified by means of deliberate factual alteration of the documents. On the manipulative use of secret service sources, see Gorazd Bajc, “Nekritična uporaba varljivih virov lahko vodi v ustvarjanje novih krivic,” *Primorski dnevnik*, 24 September 2017, 13.

20 Slovenska demokratska stranka (Slovenian Democratic Party) was formed as Socialdemokratska zveza Slovenije (SDZS) on 16 February 1989. Its name was changed to Socialdemokratska stranka Slovenije (SDSS) in the same year. It has been led by Janez Janša since 1993.

21 A site near Celje where the German authorities opened a military camp was later transformed into a prison camp. In May 1945 the camp was set aside for fleeing civilians and members of the collaborating forces of various nationalities (Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Russians, Greeks and Albanians). Germans from Kočevje, ex-members of the Kulturbund and Styrian Germans, members of the Steirischer Heimatbund, were subsequently interned. At the end of May, the *domobranci* consigned to Yugoslavia by the Anglo-American forces in Carinthia arrived. They were all executed at Bukovžlak near Teharje. A park of remembrance was inaugurated on 10 October 2004 and became a state cultural monument. See http://www.mp.gov.si/fileadmin/mp.gov.si/pageuploads/mp.gov.si/PDF/poprava_krivic/Dokumenti_in_pri-cevanja_II_Teharje.pdf.

22 <http://www.zaveza.si>.

23 <http://www.zaveza.si/index.php/component/content/article/53-teharje-2012/240-nagovor-boštjana-zadnikarja>.